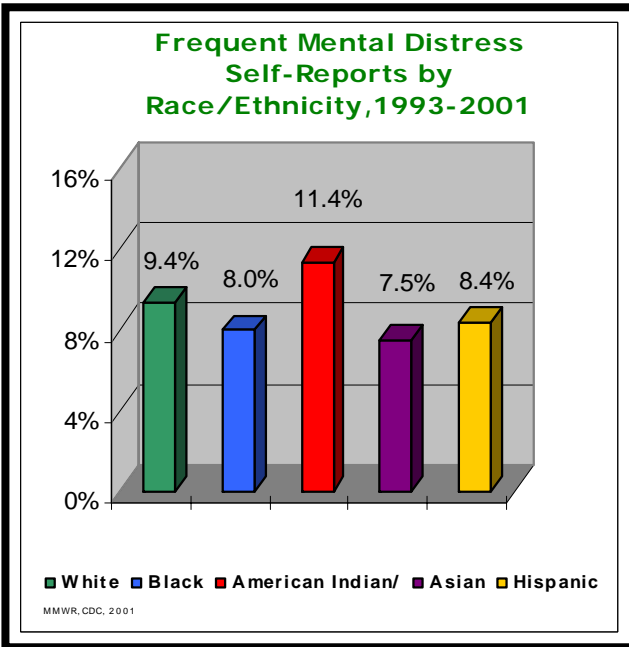


ISSUE

Greater than one-third of the demands made on health facilities in Indian country involve concerns related to mental health, alcoholism, and substance abuse.



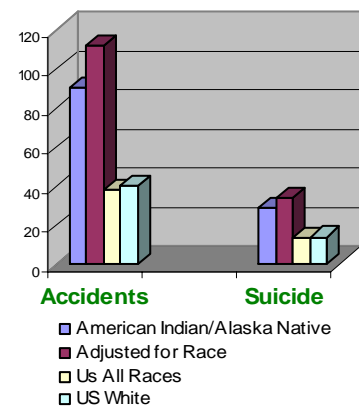
BACKGROUND

The IHS Behavioral Health programs include community-oriented clinical and preventive services whose activities are part of a broader, multidisciplinary health team that includes Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal clinics and hospitals. Over the last 15 years, most of these programs have transitioned from IHS to local community control via Tribal contracting and compacting, so Tribes are managing their own behavioral health programs. Regardless of management, however, substance abuse trauma, forced cultural change, poverty, lack of economic opportunity, and isolation significantly complicate the health process for American Indians and Alaska Natives, and overall health disparities are significant.

SITUATION

Considerable disparities exist in the psychological well-being of American Indians and Alaska Natives. American Indians, compared to the general population, tend to underutilize services, experience higher therapy drop-out rates, are less likely to respond to treatment, and have negative opinions about non-Indian providers. The suicide rate for American Indians is 60% higher than the general population. The highest suicide rate is found in American Indians ages 15-34, compared to ages 74 and older for the general population. There is a significantly higher rate of poverty in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Poverty often leads to a lack of housing and overcrowding in homes, as well as other socioeconomic, education, and health problems. Economic concerns are often related to domestic violence and childhood sexual abuse. The potential for behavioral health problems is evident.

DEATH RATES - LEADING CAUSES: Ages 15-24 yrs; (IHS Trends 1998-1999)



OPTIONS/PLANS

Additional intervention and prevention strategies that meet specific needs of individuals, families, and communities are needed. Investing in inpatient, outpatient, home, and community services will have a dramatic effect on decreasing the need for direct health services to respond to the consequences of behavioral health related issues.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For referral to the appropriate spokesperson, contact the IHS Public Affairs Staff at 301-443-3593.